

The Senate Committee on the University Budget (SCUB) Report Senate Meeting of March 23, 2011

A. OUR MANDATE

This Committee is an advisory Committee to the President and Senate. It is intended to assist the President in the preparation of the university budget by meeting with senior university officials, reviewing budgetary submissions and issues with them, and submitting recommendations to the President prior to the tabling of the annual budget with Senate. The committee should then advise Senate on the proposed university budget as submitted by the President and make recommendations, if any, to Senate.

- To be provided with information on the operating and capital funds of the University including confidential materials upon request.
- To recommend and assist in the development of consultative procedures for input by faculty, staff, students and other interested parties on the setting of the University budget.
- To review funding issues related to academic and administrative units, both as referred to the Committee by Senate and at the initiative of the Committee, and to report to Senate on such reviews.

B. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

INCUMBENT	POSITION	EXPIRY DATE
Dr. Han Donker	Faculty Senator (Chair)	3/31/2011
Dr. D. Ajit	Faculty Senator — CASHS	3/31/2012
Dr. Paul Bowles	Faculty Member	3/31/2012
Ms. Eileen Bray	VP Administration & Finance (non-voting)	N/A
Mr. Garrett Dobson	Undergraduate Student	3/31/2011
Ms. Claudette Gouger	Exempt Staff Representative	3/31/2011
Mr. Dale Laluk	CUPE Staff Representative	3/31/2011
Ms. Charlene Myers	Recording Secretary (non-voting)	N/A
Ms. Colleen Smith	Director, Finance and Budgets (non-voting)	N/A
Dr. Jueyi Sui	Faculty Member — Professional Program	3/31/2012
Ms. I. Uche-Ezeala	Graduate Student	3/31/2011
Vacant	Student Senator	3/31/2011

C. MEETINGS

The Senate Committee on the University Budget (SCUB) had meetings from September 2010 to March 2011. The meetings were focused on the budgetary process and submissions. Finally, the Chair of SCUB met with the members of the President's Executive Council on March 16, 2011.

D. REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Outlook

UNBC is facing two major concerns relating to their funding. Firstly, this year, operating funding (provincial grant) for post-secondary institutions in British Columbia remains the same as last year's overall funding. Secondly, student enrolment is still below target. Traditionally, student enrolment at universities increases during recessions. Unfortunately, UNBC has not benefited from this development. Our total enrolment target (09/10), as set by the Provincial Government was 3,396 full time equivalent student numbers, whereas our total actual enrolment was 3,005 FTE resulting in a gap of 12%. At the undergraduate level, the gap between target and actual enrolment is even larger (19%). Provincial Government funding is based on targeted numbers, not actual, for that reason UNBC has received funding based on 3,396 FTE. In June 2010, UNBC received a letter from the Minister of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development (ALMD) which stated that the Minister may request universities that "remain, substantially below target to submit a plan for achieving greater enrolment in future year. Further, ALMD may review funding allocations for targeted programs with low enrolment, which may result in reallocation of resources to higher demand programming." In addition, planning projections for the budget years ahead (2012/2013 – 2013/2014) show, ceteris paribus, a deficit of \$1.2 million for 2012/2013, respectively \$1.9 million for 2013/2014.

UNBC has begun responding by taking action in the current academic year:

- University Action Plan;
- Advertising campaigns in several cities across Canada;
- Utilizing Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) for international recruitment;
- Appointment of an Assistant Provost for Student Success and Enrolment Management.

The administration is looking at a two to three year timeframe before undergraduate enrolments increase to reflect these responses.

Use of Current Resources

The current uncertainty with respect to UNBC's budgetary prospects and student enrolment, as outlined in the previous section, is a challenge for the administration of UNBC. In order to increase student enrolment with a zero-sum budget and a budget deficit on the horizon, a more comprehensive approach is needed. It is incumbent on Senate to ensure that in considering any program changes, new programs or new initiatives that it seek explicit explanations from the proposing unit(s) on how such proposals will be resourced. Growth and new program development can be accomplished but only through the reallocation of existing resources. Internal reallocation of resources to those (new) programs and/or (new) majors with the best chance of securing or increasing enrolment might be an option to consider although we realize that not all academic disciplines/programs are suitable for this approach. Support of faculty and adequate coordination by management are necessary to execute this operation. It is clear that previous ways of behaviour, in which units have proposed new programs or initiatives in the expectation that, if they prove successful, additional resources will be forthcoming, is not sustainable for the foreseeable future.

Coherence between Budget and Action Plan

In 2010, UNBC launched a University Action Plan with the following themes:

- Leader in renewable energy;
- Engaging undergraduate students in research and experiential learning;
- Enriching learning experience through new pedagogical models;
- Increasing the impact of our research through capacity and external linkages;
- Encouraging a respectful, supportive, exciting, and friendly environment;
- Transforming our communities through the contributions of our alumni.

This largely consolidates other aims of the university (such as being a small research intensive university committed to teaching excellence; Canada's Green University; and having special relationships with First Nations communities).

However, it is presently unclear how the University Action Plan is reflected in the budget-making process (ex-ante). Budget decisions and choices regarding capital investments, new program developments and directions are only loosely aligned with the Action Plan of the university. Priorities in the University Action Plan should be aligned with the request for critical needs. We noticed that limited communication among budget holders at various levels took place. As a result, requests for critical needs of individual departments had the upper hand. While the “bottom-up” approach has considerable benefits and enables units best able to identify their needs to present their budget requests, it does risk losing overall coherence and adherence to university level mandates and goals. For this reason, we recommend that future budgets incorporate explicit reference to the strategic goals and action plan of the university.

Graduate Admissions Process

The University Action Plan 2010 states that delays, problems, and inconsistencies in administrative support should be eliminated. We fully support this intention and believe that a more applicant-friendly environment will benefit the university and student enrolment. Given the decline in domestic student enrolment, a more active role needs to be developed regarding the process of student applications and turnaround times should be kept at a minimum. We believe that an investment in a more efficient admission and less bureaucratic process will increase graduate enrolment at UNBC. A dynamic enrolment process for graduate students would also be very beneficial. The current organizational structure misses a balance between individual responsibility, information access and accountability regarding student enrolment. The current organizational structure is counterproductive and lacks an “all-in-one” approach, whereby academic programs, registration, recruitment, communication, and marketing are organized in such a way that these units support the strategic goals of UNBC. UNBC now relies heavily on graduate students to meet its enrollment targets but the graduate admission process remains slow and cumbersome, decisions on graduate entrance scholarships are made too late and programs lack certainty with regard to levels of Teaching Assistantship funding;

the result is that the Committee believes that UNBC is not as competitive as it could be in attracting graduate students.

This general point has been made in the past and additional staffing resources have been allocated to Graduate Admissions. However, slow decision-making remains a problem. Graduate applications cannot currently be tracked as a result of the process being manual, but that upon transitioning to an automated system, this will be possible. Developing an automated system for graduate applications is a necessary need for attracting graduate students in a competitive world. We believe that this automated system should be part of the graduate student recruitment plan. In the meantime, waiting for a ‘technological fix’, should not be used as a reason for accepting the status quo; in order to compete in this market, UNBC must offer comparable, if not better, applicant service in terms of speed of decision-making on applications and scholarships.

International Recruitment

International students are not included in the provincial government’s funding formula. However, tuition fees for international undergraduate students are much higher than for domestic students. Further, international student retention rate is good, with only approximately 5% of students leaving. UNBC focuses on recruitment activities in China, where relationships have already been established. Some universities in Canada developed “two-plus-two” programs with other universities, an approach which can be beneficial to UNBC.

With regard to international recruitment, web presence is crucial. We strongly believe that improvement of UNBC website by standardizing program web pages, focusing more on students, and providing accurate and up-to-date information are important. Resources should be allocated to support existing and build new websites.

Budget Process

With regard to the budget process, transparency and communication are essential when new developments or plans are proposed or implemented. A well-balanced number of

Town hall meetings can be used to disseminate new plans to faculty and staff. Rumor and uncertainty among faculty and staff can be minimized through open communication and transparency. More clarity on the process regarding the budget is needed once it leaves the administrative unit. Furthermore, we believe that the budgeting process should be initiated in July or August, and that a more substantive approach to the full budget would be useful. This will allow for greater consultation between budget holders.

We also suggest that decisions made by PEC regarding critical needs, which are not part of the current budget package, will be communicated to Senate in a later stage (April/May).

Private Funding

Given the constraints on public funding, many universities have inevitably turned to the private sector to fund some new faculty positions, for example: Endowed Chair positions, which have funding that is independent of government. In addition, many universities have attracted academics and professionals from the private sector to teach at the university at no/limited cost. These options may be more feasible in large cities but there may be some opportunities in northern B.C. Obtaining private funding, however, requires a strategy and a clear understanding of the appropriate conditions for its use. As UNBC looks forward, and in the context of continuing constrained public funding, now is an appropriate time for UNBC to have a university-wide discussion of alternative funding sources. Coordinated action between departments/programs, VP External Relations, Board of Governors, and Alumni is necessary to be successful in raising funds. We believe that a detailed Advancement Plan should be developed in the short run. To be effective, positions in VP External Relations department should be fully funded.